Favour to MNCs by the Railways

328. SHRIMATI CHANDRA KALA PANDEY: Will the Minister of RAILWAY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to a news-item "Railways Scheme favours MNC" appearing in the 'Times of India' Kolkata dated 19th January, 2001; and

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) to proliferate retail railway ticketing through the use of Service Providers and terminal operators so that there is a saving in the cost for the railways and improvement in customer interface process, Indian Railways has entered into an MoU with Indian Railway catering & Tourism Corporation Ltd. (IRCTC) to facilitate railway ticketing. IRCTC in turn will appoint Service Providers to give them IT support in the form of hardware, software and the technology and finance. The terminal operators may also be appointed in India and abroad to facilitate ticketing. As the volume of traffic on Indian Railways is quite large, it has been decided to invite offers only from those parties who have wide experience in this field and are technically and financially very sound. Inicidentally, most of the companies short-listed are Indian Companies or Consortium of Indian companies with other partners.

Funds Crunches in Railways

329. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Railways are feeling funds crunch in implementing the recommendations of Railways Safety Review Committee; and

(b) if so, what arrangements have the Railways made to rehabilitate the over aged Railway assets and running stock to avert Rail accidents.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) (a) and (b) The Railway Finances are presently passing through a difficult phase, primarily due to the impact of implementation of the Fifth Central Pay Commission recommendations. Despite financial constraints, safety has been accorded the highest priority within the available resources, which is indicated in the figures of expenditure on safety given below:—

(Rs. in crore)

1998-99	2313
1999-2000	2656
2000-01 (RE)	2902

However, much more is needed. Separately, a pilot project for development and testing of an anti-collision device has been taken up on N.F. Railway at a cost of Rs. 50 crore. Various other steps have also been taken to strengthen safety, including provision of walkie-talkie sets to Drivers & Guards.

The Railway Safety Review Committee has in its interim Report, recommended that the Central Government should provide a one-time grant of Rs. 15000 crore to the Railways for rehabilitation of their over-aged assets. Government's attention has been drawn to this recommendation. But in view of the overall fiscal constraints, Government has not extended this specific assistance so far. However, the Government has separately transferrd Rs. 200 crore during 1999-2000 and Rs. 300 crore during the current year to the Railways from the Central Road Fund to facilitate the execution of

specific safety works such as manning of unmanned level crossings and construction of Rail over/under bridges.

Conversion of Darbhanga-Nirmali Rail Line

†330. PROF. RAM DEO BHANDARY: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) the action being taken for gauge conversion of Darbhanga-Nirmali rail line in Samastipur division and also the Jhanjharpur-Lokana rail line in the same division of North Eastern Railway; and

(b) what is the latest status of the work in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS: (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) Gauge conversioon of Darbhnga-Sakri is sanctioned as part of Narkatiaganj-Raxaul-Darbhanga-Jaynagar project. Work is in progress and earthwork for 29 km link has been completed. Tenders for a ballast supply have been called. This work would be completed in the coming years as per availability of resources. Gauge conversion of Sakri-Nirmali and Janjharpur-Lokahabazar is not yet sanctioned.

Rail Line Between Hubli and Ankola

331. SHRI S.R. BOMMAI: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to refer to answer to unstarred Question 1395, given in the Rajya Sabha on the 1st December, 2000 and state what is the progress made on the project for laying new Hubli-Ankola rail line and how much amount has been spent so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : The Final Location Survey for the work has been completed.Land acquisition is presently in progress. The work would be started once the land is made available. An amount of 6.42 cr. has been incurred on the project up to 31.3.2000. An outlay of Rs. 6 cr. has also been provided in 2000-01.

---

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.